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ABSTRACT

This report documents a study undertaken to determine the feasibility of and need for an information desk at the Kent State University (KSU) Library. Study methodology included gathering information through a review of the literature and a telephone survey of six academic libraries in Ohio comparable in size and holdings to KSU in order to develop a statistics sheet delineating questions that might be handled away from the reference desk; the statistics sheet was then used in a six-week survey of the types of questions received at KSU's reference desk. Based on a review of the survey data and the consideration of six alternatives available to the KSU library, the following options are recommended: (1) a temporary information desk to be established for 3-5 weeks at the beginning of the fall semester, or (2) a combined information/periodical desk. The use of a simplified statistics sheet to track reference activity is also suggested. The statistical results of the KSU reference desk survey are presented in 12 tables together with an analysis of each table; sample statistics sheets are included; and 6 references are provided. (KM)

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THE LIBRARY INFORMATION DESK: NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

(Committee Report, Kent State University Library, Fall, 1986)

IR052002

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BACKGROUND RESEARCH

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature indicates that there is considerable interest in the matter of information desks. Though there is only limited information available on the subject, the studies that have been done are comprehensive enough to provide some very useful information.

In general, an information desk is viewed as a desk located in an area that is readily available to patrons on first entering the building. Thus the visibility and accessibility of the information desk assume top priority in the installation of an information desk.

Regarding the functions of an information desk, it appears that there is a wide range of responsibilities assigned to this desk dependent on staffing and resources available. However, an information desk on the whole, handled mainly directional questions concerning location of sources, provided some instructional assistance in the use of the card catalog or terminals, and simple reference regarding library's holdings in response to phone or in-person questions. Nearly half of all questions about locating materials asked at the information desk was found to be concerning periodicals.

One extensive study indicated that there was a significant correlation between the use of an information desk and a decentralized system of reference. A centralized reference service (such as KSU's), was generally regarded as being capable of assuming most or all of the services of an information desk. However, a study done in a large reseach library with a decentralized reference service saw that a significant demand for services ususally provided by an information desk was found to be limited to only a few weeks at the beginning of the fall semester.

Information desks in academic libraries performed more instructional services and therefore more than forty percent of the work was considered to be professional in nature. A large percentage of the academic libraries indicated that a professional librarian was needed to staff the information desk during the day. As some librarians thought none of the information desk duty was professional and other considered all the work professional, the question of staffing seems an unresolved issue best decided upon by the individual library's needs.

At least one author noted that a major number of academic libraries with information desks still staffed general reference desks. Statistics show that the existence of information desks did not deflect service from the reference desk. Many of the libraries that had information desks also had catalog assistance desks. In libraries that did not have information desks, these

functions were performed by the reference or circulation department.

PHONE SURVEY OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN OHIO

The feasibility and need for information desks has been studied by many libraries. In our search for an appropriate plan for KSU, we decided to conduct a phone survey of a few major libraries that were comparable in size and holdings to our library, in order to determine how they had handled this question, and to see if we could draw any parallels to help us in our decision. The results of that survey are summarized in the chart on the following page.

We discovered that all of the libraries had at one time or another considered the need for an information desk. The major reason given for having any type of an information desk was to reduce the number of directional questions at the reference desk and to relieve the professional librarians for other professional duties.

One library had decided to set up a temporary desk at the beginning of each quarter to handle the increased number of directional questions from new students. Another library was in the process of setting up an information desk on a trial basis for one year. Two libraries had a permanent, separate information desk while one had a combination Reference/Information desk. The hours for the desk varied from regular library hours to one that was open only as staffing was available and the desk was generally staffed by library staff from all departments and students.

Those libraries that had an information desk did not have a separate catalog desk but offered catalog assistance at this desk. One library had a catalog desk rather than an information desk which was open for a restricted number of hours each day. Fifty percent of the libraries surveyed had a separate periodicals desk.

Where libraries had information desks, they were generally located near the main entrance and were under the supervision of the Reference Department. The library that did not have a separate information desk had a combination Reference/Information desk.

From our literature review and phone survey, it appears essential that a service point from which directional questions are answered needs to be determined and identified as such.

RESULTS OF PHONE SURVEY OF OHIO LIBRARIES 9/86

IVERSITY	GENERAL INFO DESK Y/N	IF "YES" WHY?	HOURS?	STAFFED BY:	IF "NO LONGER HAVE ONE" WHY?	SEPARATE CATALOG DESK? Y/N	SEPARATE PERIODICAL DESK? Y/N	LOCATION	NOTE
UNIVERSITY #1	YES	New dean wanted one to free librarians	Same hours (as library)	Library staff from various depts. (in 2 hr. blocks) Students on nights-w/ends		Info desk answers mainly directionals, holdings info	YES	Just inside the main entrance	Reference Department responsibl
UNIVERSITY #2	Had one at beginning of each qtr but not sure as yet aoout this fall	To take load off Reference Desk				No	Separate desk/4th fl. closed stack and current periodicals		
UNIVERSITY #3	Yes Very informal	To handle directional questions - particularly in evening	When easeriti are available - needed in evening	Retired faculty	No longer have formal, full time desk due to staff cuts			Near the main entrance	Head of Public Service responsible
UNIVERSITY #4	Yes	To reduce directional questions at Reference Desk	7:30 a.m.- 9:30 p.m.	Full time clerk and students in the evening		Info desk handles catalog/ online terminal questions	Yes With gov. docs. in basement	Near the main entrance	Reference head supervises
UNIVERSITY #5	No				It was ignored. Patrons went to Ref/Circ.	Yes Not staffed by Ref. 10-4 M-H 10-7 F	Yes Open full time. Desk is hidden so Ref/Circ still get periodical questions		Reference desks staffed by students 9-12 p.m.
UNIVERSITY #6	No					No	No		Reference desk is "info desk"

SURVEY OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS AT Kent State University

In order to evaluate the need for a separate service point to handle directional questions, the committee conducted a six-week survey of the types of questions received at KSU's Reference Desk. The survey was conducted during the first, second and third weeks of Fall semester, (September 9 through September 26, 1986), and again during the eighth, ninth, and tenth weeks of the semester (November 1 through November 21, 1986).

Via the literature search and the phone survey, the committee had identified several categories of "directional" questions which might be handled away from the KSU Reference Desk. A statistics sheet which delineated these questions was designed, and Reference staff were asked to record all transactions which occured at the Reference Desk during the survey period. Transactions were recorded by staff as they occurred.

The data collected was summarized in the statistical tables which follow. In analyzing these statistics, however, a number of trends were identified. The list below provides some interesting insights into directional questions received at KSU's Reference Desk.

DIRECTIONAL STATISTICS AT THE REFERENCE DESK

SURVEY TRENDS

--DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS ACCOUNT FOR 50% TO 60% OF ALL QUESTIONS AT THE KSU REFERENCE DESK

--DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS GENERALLY DECREASED AS THE SEMESTER PROGRESSED (A TREND REPORTED BY OTHER LIBRARIES, PER THE LIBRARY LITERATURE).

--DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE SURVEY, THE PERCENTAGE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS DECREASED BY ABOUT 10%.

--TOTAL OCLC DIRECTIONAL SEARCHES GENERALLY INCREASED AS THE SEMESTER PROGRESSED (IN CONTRAST TO THE OVERALL DECREASE IN TOTAL DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS).

--THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS PERTAIN TO THE LOCATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES AND SOURCES. THIS CATAGORY ACCOUNTED FOR 40% TO 50% OF ALL DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS.

--DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS ABOUT PERIODICALS GENERALLY DECREASED AS THE SEMESTER PROGRESSED; STATISTICS DROPPED BY ABOUT 100 QUESTIONS PER WEEK DURING THE SECOND PART OF THE SURVEY.

--PERIODICAL QUESTIONS RANGED BETWEEN 14% TO 22% OF ALL QUESTIONS RECEIVED AT THE REFERENCE DESK.

--THE BUSIEST DAY FOR DIRECTIONALS IS MONDAY, WITH VOLUME GRADUALLY DROPPING AS THE WEEK PROGRESSES, TO A LOW ON SATURDAY.

--THE BUSIEST HOURS ARE 1-5PM, ESPECIALLY 1-4PM. SMALLER PEAKS OCCUR FROM NOON TO 1PM, AND AGAIN FROM 6-7PM IN THE EVENING.

While these trends provide a broad overview, a more detailed picture of directional activity can be found in the following statistical analyses. Although a number of tables are presented, they have purposely been kept very simple; usually only a few figures and a paragraph or two of conclusions. Thus the following section will begin with a brief list of analyses, to facilitate easy browsing among the statistical results of the survey.

DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS AT THE REFERENCE DESK

LIST OF STATISTICAL ANALYSES

1. TOTAL DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS

2. AVERAGE DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS PER HOUR

3. PEAK DAYS OF THE WEEK FOR DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS

4. PEAK HOURS OF THE DAY FOR DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS

5. DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS BY TYPE
   - A. LOCATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES & SOURCES
   - B. LIBRARY REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES
   - C. REFERRALS TO THE AUTHOR/TITLE CARD CATALOG
   - D. PERIODICAL QUESTIONS
   - E. OCLC SEARCHES FOR KSU PERIODICALS
   - F. OCLC SEARCHES FOR OTHER LIBRARIES' HOLDINGS
   - G. OCLC SEARCHES FOR KSU BOOKS
   - H. TOTAL OCLC SEARCHES

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

TOTAL DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number of Directionals	912	886	1049	788	702	768
Total Questions	1534	1654	1862	1517	1493	1561
Directionals as a % of Total	60%	54%	56%	52%	47%	49%

ANALYSIS: Directional questions comprised about 50 to 60 percent of all Reference Desk transactions. During this survey the following types of questions were considered "directional":

Library Regulations and Procedures
Location of Library Sources or Services
Periodicals Location/Holdings
OCLC Searches for KSU and Other Libraries' Holdings
Simple Referrals to the Author/Title Card Catalog

There was an overall decrease in both the number and percentage of directional questions during the survey. Directional questions dropped by about 150 or 10%, between Week 1 and Week 10 of the semester. According to the library literature, this trend is seen by many libraries, and may occur naturally as patrons become oriented to the building and services.

AVERAGE DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS PER HOUR

TIME	HIGH	LOW	AVERAGE
9am	18	0	7
10am	26	1	9
11am	33	2	11
Noon	24	1	11
1pm	31	1	13
2pm	30	0	14
3pm	30	1	13
4pm	26	0	12
5pm	21	1	8
6pm	28	1	14
7pm	29	1	12
8pm	30	0	11
9pm	27	0	8

ANALYSIS: These figures show that the volume of directional questions can range from 0 to a high of 33, during some hours. The average column provides a broad estimate of the number of directional inquiries which may occur during an "average" hour. It should be noted that some "high" figures may be incomplete, since librarians are often unable to answer the phone during very busy periods.

PEAK DAYS OF THE WEEK FOR DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS

	SAT	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
INPERSON	330	520	1045	865	906	791	382
PHONE	19	38	72	42	56	38	31
TOTAL DIRECTIONAL	349	558	1117	907	962	829	413

ANALYSIS: The peak days for directional questions appear to be weekdays, with Monday the busiest. (This is consistent with the long-standing axiom that Monday night is the busiest night in the week for KSU Reference Librarians.) Interestingly, there are substantially fewer directional questions on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with Saturday showing the lowest volume of the week. These statistics can be used to help allocate staffing levels at any service point handling these directional questions. It is important to note that some phone inquiries may not have been recorded since the Reference Department has found it necessary to use an answering machine to postpone calls, when it is very busy at the desk.

TRENDS IN PEAK HOURS

TIME	INPERSON DIRECTIONAL	PHONE DIRECTIONAL	PERCENT OF TOTAL DIRECTIONAL
9am	235	28	5%
10am	290	35	6%
11am	350	23	7%
Noon	360	21	8%
1pm	502	45	11%
2pm	512	39	11%
3pm	515	25	11%
4pm	439	39	10%
5pm	326	9	7%
6pm	403	24	8%
7pm	365	7	7%
8pm	321	7	6%
9pm	172	10	4%

ANALYSIS: Overall, the busiest hours for directional questions tend to be from 1-5pm. There are smaller peaks between noon and 1pm, and again between 6-7pm in the evenings. This information can be used to assist in the staffing allocation of any service point handling these directional questions.

DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS BY TYPE

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: Location of Library Service & Sources

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	380	434	467	313	286	323
% of Total Directional	42%	49%	45%	40%	41%	42%

ANALYSIS: The most frequently asked type of directional question. Since it includes the common question on where specific call numbers are shelved, patrons usually use the card catalog first to obtain a call number. Thus it might be hard to remove these questions from the Reference Desk, unless an "information desk" is also responsible for card catalog assistance (or its NOTIS equivalent). The library literature reveals that catalog assistance is a primary function at some information desks.

This category also includes such questions as "where are the encyclopedias?" This type of question should probably continue to be answered at the Reference Desk since it is frequently a reference question in disguise.

Finally, these questions decreased in number over the second part of the survey (weeks 8,9, and 10); a trend consistent with the overall decrease in directional statistics.

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: Library Regulations and Procedures

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	85	56	78	96	72	56
% of Total Directional	9%	6%	7%	12%	10%	7%

ANALYSIS: These questions include inquiries about interlibrary loan procedures, circulation of special materials, use of group discussion rooms, smoking areas, etc. While library handouts are useful, many patrons do not wish to read a lengthy document to find the answer to their question. Many of these questions are probably handled at the circulation desk now, and these questions are prime candidates for delegation to an information desk.

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: Referrals to the Author/Title Card Catalog

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	38	32	51	44	50	43
% of Total Directional	4%	4%	5%	6%	7%	6%

ANALYSIS: These are directional questions in that the librarian simply refers the patron to the author/title card catalog. Most of them occur when a patron asks if we own a particular title or author's work. If the librarian judges that the item will be easy to locate in the card catalog, the patron is sometimes simply referred to the catalog, with the invitation to return to the Reference Desk if they cannot locate the item. Since most of these questions are very simple, they might eventually be handled by nonprofessionals.

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: Periodicals

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	269	240	267	170	143	167
% of Total Directional	30%	27%	26%	22%	21%	22%

ANALYSIS: The Reference staff reports that this type of question is one of the most time-consuming. Such questions frequently require lengthy explanations due to the complexity of locating serials in the building. Periodicals are currently spread over three floors, and patrons are unfamiliar with their binding and shelving peculiarities.

It is interesting to note that significantly more of these questions occurred at the beginning of the semester. Specifically, there were 269 periodical questions during Week 1; 240 during Week 2; and 267 during Week 3. But during the eighth week of the semester, there were only 170 questions, 143 during week 9, and 167 during week 10. This decrease of approximately 100 questions per week may suggest that some patrons learn how to use the periodical collections on their own, perhaps due in part to the training received at the Reference desk, and during bibliographic instruction.

The statistics compiled in this survey are different than those collected during a one-week survey in April of 1986. That survey indicated that there were 376 in-person serials holdings questions during the week of April 22 through April 28, and 33 serials holding phone questions during the following week. One possible explanation, some reference librarians have noticed that periodicals questions have seemed to drop off during the semester, but take a sudden leap up near the very end of the semester, when a number of patrons who have never used the library suddenly appear to complete assignments at the "last minute". The collection of further statistics would be needed to verify such a trend.

During this survey, however, a separate but related figure on the use of OCLC for periodical location and holdings information was compiled. These statistics may overlap with those above in that some of these OCLC questions might also have been recorded as "plain" periodical questions. Still, they might serve to reflect the minimum amount of holdings information that a separate periodicals desk might expect. And finally, the statistics on OCLC searches for the holdings of other libraries might include some additional periodical questions which are not reflected in the totals below.

The following totals reflect the maximum number of directional periodical questions recorded during the survey.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Periodical Questions(Non-OCLC)	269	240	267	170	143	167
OCLC Periodical Questions	69	64	98	87	67	97
Total Periodical Questions	338	304	365	257	210	264
% of Total Directional	37%	34%	35%	33%	30%	34%
% of Total Questions	22%	19%	20%	17%	14%	17%

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: OCLC Searches for KSU Periodicals

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	69	64	98	87	67	97
% of Total Directional	8%	7%	9%	11%	10%	13%

ANALYSIS: This number could increase or decrease, depending on the number of public terminals available for use in the Reference Center. These questions are regarded as time-consuming in that staff regularly spend time checking more than one title on OCLC, (although they were probably recorded as only "one" question in the statistics above). They also take time in that they regularly involve obtaining "print-outs", contacting the bindery unit, etc. These statistics may in turn have some overlap with the following figures on OCLC searches for other libraries holdings.

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: OCLC Searches for Other Libraries' Holdings

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	42	27	24	34	31	32
% of Total Directional	5%	3%	2%	4%	4%	4%

ANALYSIS: Again, each of the searches may involve more than one title, and they frequently include "extended searches" where the holdings of more than one record are evaluated. Such searches are frequently done for patrons who need a print out because they wish to obtain an item through interlibrary loan. At other institutions, these questions are handled by the Circulation Desk or the Interlibrary Loan Department. This category may also overlap with the following statistics on OCLC searches for KSU Books.

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: OCLC Searches for KSU Books

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	28	22	45	51	47	53
% of Total Directional	3%	3%	4%	7%	7%	7%

ANALYSIS: A number of these questions are phone questions, and others result from patrons who request assistance when they are unsuccessful/inexperienced in card catalog use. Some patrons are aware that recent titles do not appear in the catalog for some time (due to filing lags), and thus ask for assistance; others are seeking the item through interlibrary loan and need a print-out. The increasing trend over the semester could indicate that more patrons are using the card catalog as the semester progresses, and this may be reflected in the number asking the Reference Librarian to assist. Phone questions in particular are handled by the Circulation Department at many automated universities.

TYPE OF DIRECTIONAL QUESTION: Total OCLC Searches

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Number	139	118	167	172	145	182
% of Total Directional	15%	13%	16%	22%	21%	24%

ANALYSIS: The overall, directional use of OCLC increased as the semester progressed, even though directional questions as a whole decreased. Perhaps as researchers become more experienced, they learn to come to the Reference Desk for bindery/holdings information. Or perhaps more research is being done as the semester progresses.

The preceeding statistics were most useful to the committee in evaluating alternatives for directional service at KSU library. These figures allowed the committee to evaluate KSU's unique service needs, and much of this data formed the base of the committee recommendations which conclude this report.

In evaluating potential recommendations, however, the committee systematically considered several alternatives available to KSU library. They are described below.

ALTERNATIVES

Libraries have devised a number of methods to handle "directional" questions from their patrons. This committee was able to identify six alternatives warranting evaluation by KSU, specifically:

— A PERMANENT, SEPARATE INFORMATION DESK

— A TEMPORARY, SEPARATE INFORMATION DESK

— A COMBINED REFERENCE/INFORMATION DESK (STATUS QUO)

— A COMBINED CIRCULATION/INFORMATION DESK

— A COMBINED INFORMATION/PERIODICALS DESK

— A COMPARTMENTALIZED REFERENCE DESK

ANALYSIS

What an information desk might accomplish depends to a great extent on the following:

a) library layout
b) location of the desk
c) staffing level (professional, para-professional, etc.)

In analyzing the options above, the committee felt that a "compartmentalization" of our current Reference Desk was the least effective alternative. While the library literature reveals at least one library who successfully implemented this option, several drawbacks were apparent. The library in question hoped to "intercept" many directional questions by placing a student assistant closest to the flow of traffic. In theory the student would handle the directional questions, and refer the reference questions to a Reference Librarian located at the same desk. The committee had several concerns about implementing this procedure at KSU, specifically:

1. Patrons approach our Reference Desk from many different angles; a student could not cover them all simultaneously.

2. Patrons would request service from whichever staff member was available; if the student was busy with one patron, they would probably approach the Reference Librarian for assistance, and vice versa. Asking patrons to wait for the appropriate staff member to become free could cause frustration.

Overall, the committee felt this procedure would not substantially improve service nor reduce librarians' desk hours. Since it might reduce the number of directional questions handled by professionals, however, it could allow slightly more time for reference transactions. Thus if the reference staff would like to experiment with this procedure, it would be easy to organize a trial. In general, however this arrangement was not viewed as an adequate response to this committee's charge.

The committee briefly examined another form of "compartmentalization", specifically an "on call" system for Reference Librarians. One interesting point about this alternative is that it is essentially "plannning for less staffing than you know you're going to need".

The committee also felt that establishing a permanent, separate information desk on the first floor was not warranted. The current limits on both space and staff made the establishment of an additional service point to handle simple "directional" questions seem undesirable. In addition, unless such a desk was set up to handle periodical, OCLC or card catalog questions, it would probably not significantly reduce the staffing needs at the Reference Desk.

Another alternative involves the reorganization of the circulation desk. Due to its prominent location in the lobby, a substantial number of directional inquiries are already handled by the Circulation staff. The primary drawback of a combined Circulation/Information desk is the lack of appropriately trained

staff. Due to the sheer size of the circulation desk area, it might be easy to compartmentalize the desk by installing a large "information here" sign, but current staff duties would need to be adjusted to support the addition of such an expanded service point. Due to the number and turnover of the student assistants in that department, it would require intense and time-consuming training to prepare them to provide quality service.

Many libraries handle directional questions at a combined Reference/Information Desk, such as that currently in operation here at KSU. While the main drawback of such a system is that professional librarians spend some time answering routine questions, it has several distinct advantages. Not the least is patron convenience, in that they may obtain any type of assistance needed from a single service point. In addition, the Reference staff is often considered the best qualified to handle such inquiries, since many patrons who ask a directional question actually need reference assistance. Reference librarians and their assistants are well equiped to recognize such reference requests "in disguise", and are also better able to monitor overall public service needs from a combined reference/information desk.

If present limits on space and resources make it difficult to implement the following commmittee recommendations, it might be possible to improve patron awareness of our present Reference/Information desk service by clearly labeling the Reference counter closest to the entrance with the word "INFORMATION". The net result of such action would probably be to increase the need for staff at the Reference desk, (perhaps even drawing some inquiries away from the Circulation desk). Although the "status quo" (a combined Reference/Information desk) is a managable alternative for KSU, the committee recommends the following.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OPTION 1

Many libraries have found a "temporary" information desk the best way to handle the large percentage of directional questions which occur at the beginning of Fall semester. Examples of such an arrangement were found in both the literature search and the phone survey conducted by this committee. After careful consideration the committee felt that a temporary desk would be an appropriate library service at KSU, with excellent public relations potential. While such a desk requires a significant commitment of staff time, it could go a long way toward establishing a favorable image of the library, particularly during orientation weeks, when so many are receiving their imporatant first impressions. The only risk is that some patrons might "miss" the temporary desk after its removal.

If this alternative is implemented, the committee recommends that the desk be established for 3-5 weeks at the beginning of next Fall semester.The desk should be located in the lobby, and be easily dismantled so that patrons don't see a vacant service point during hours it is not staffed. An evaluation of the KSU statistics indicates that the desk should be staffed from 9am-

8pm, Monday through Thursday, (a total of 44 hours per week). Adjustments might be made in the hours, once more is learned during actual operation.

The committee also recommends that trained para-professionals be used as staff, since quality service will be essential to good public relations. Perhaps three employees could be selected to allocate 15 hours per week to the information desk, during the five week period. At an average paraprofessional salary of $10 per hour, the library would be allocating a total of about $2250 in staff time, for this new service. It should be noted that Fall semester is a very busy period for all public service workers, however, (new student assistants must be trained, etc.) and spare staff time for the information desk may be hard to find.

Since many directional questions will involve the use of OCLC or NOTIS, we might consider placing a portable terminal at the information desk. In addition, it should be clear that it is not anticipated that this alternative will reduce the number of professional hours spent at the Reference Desk. In fact, one university found that their new information desk actually doubled the number of questions asked at the Reference Desk. If the responsibility for the organization, operation and supervision of this additional service point is assigned to the Reference Department, a net increase in actual staff responsibilities will result. Thus, the primary advantages of this option are improved service image and good public relations, rather than reductions in Reference Staff duties.

OPTION 2

If it is desirable to simultaneously improve service AND reduce the amount of staffing at the Reference Desk, the committee recommends that a combined Information/Periodical desk be considered. In general, the establishment of a combined Information/Periodical desk would have several distinct advantages:

--A single service point would provide both periodical and directional information. When these two major service needs are combined, the volume (700-1000 questions per week) warrants a permanent, dedicated service point. Since this single service point would also provide security (closed egress) for the current periodicals, services are thus grouped for maximum staffing efficiency.

--Patron convenience would be increased, due to the excellent location of this service point directly in front of the entrance turnstiles. Since patrons must no longer ponder "which way to turn" upon entering, the library is made more accessible and patrons are better served.

--Reference Desk staffing needs might be reduced, since Reference staff will no longer spend as much time handling routine, directional questions. While the Reference Center would remain clearly visible and accessible from the building entrance, a clearly marked "Information/Periodical" desk might effectively reduce the work load at the Reference Desk.

Such a reduction could not be guaranteed, however, since an improved service layout on the first floor may actually increase questions at the Reference Desk (and other service points). This phenomenon has been reported in the literature.

In addition, it might be possible to transfer other circulation services to this desk, specifically a central phone answering service and some catalog assistance. KSU Reference Desk statistics showed that directional phone calls (including holdings questions) ranged from 39 to 121 calls per week, during the survey period.

Although a significant allotment of staff would be needed to handle these services, (100 hours of paraprofessional time per week, plus student assistance), it might be feasible to select 5 paraprofessionals to work 20 hours per week. Although some professional supervision would no doubt be desirable, the overall increase in efficiency engendered by this combined service point seems desirable.

Qualified staff would be a key ingredient in the success of a combined periodical/information desk. It's possible that the 100% increase in Reference Desk questions which resulted from one library's new Information Desk, might be attributed to their choice of staff. They elected to use volunteers from all departments of the library, along with students. It seems it might well be difficult to thoroughtly train and motivate so many "part-time" information desk workers.

In general, it seems that:

1. Any general information desk should be placed where it is easily visible from the entrance and will shield the Reference Desk.

2. Any such permanent desk could also be placed where it can assist patrons with serials questions.

3. Phone calls might also be screened at such a combined service point (terminals will be needed to answer serials questions).

STATISTCS COLLECTION

When gathering our statistics, it became apparent that the more complicated the statistics sheet was, the more difficulty there would be in filling it in and the more mistakes would be made.

As a by-product of our study we are suggesting that a more simplified statistics sheet be used for our everyday use in hopes that it will be less trouble to use and thereby provide greater accuracy and more reliable data.

The matter of accuracy brings up the possibility of creating a column that would act as a check on the validity of the numbers of questions entered. The combination of number of questions recorded and an indication of the librarian's judgement as to how busy the hour was, could give a much more reliable estimate of the activity and in turn, of staffing needs. It seems that at times the numbers of questions marked down in no way expresses how busy we thought that particular hour was.

We are suggesting the possibility of experimenting with a "hecticity" rating for each hour. The librarian at the desk would simply mark down (a judgement call) at the end of each hour as to how busy the hour seemed using the scale of "1 to 5". The number "1" would be "dead or deserted" and "5" would be "hectic". There would be no correlation made between the librarian and the number of questions marked or the hecticity rating. The total of the two columns from the two sheets used each hour could be entered on a tally sheet just as the other totals are. If desired, an average hecticity level could then be gotten for any hour, day, week, etc.

Since the committee was not sure that OCLC and documents statistics were continually needed, the committee suggests that an individual statistics sheet be used to collect them for short periods of time, if they are needed in the future.

Two samples of what such a simplified data collection sheet might look like are attached.

Day: Date:

REFERENCE DESK STATISTICS

	In-person Questions				Phone Questions				Level
	REFERENCE	Tot	DIRECTIONAL	Tot	REFERENCE	Tot	DIRECTIONAL	Tot	1 to 5
9									
10									
11									
12									
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
Totals:									

Comments, etc.:

☐ = difficult questions

Hecticity Level: 1=dead 2=slow 3=steady 4=busy 5=hectic

Day: Date:

REFERENCE CENTER STATISTICS

	REFERENCE QUESTIONS	Total 1	Total 0	DIRECTIONAL QUESTIONS	Total 1	Total 0	LEVEL 1 to 5
9							
10							
11							
12							
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
Totals:							

Comments, etc.:

Questions: / = in-person 0 = phone ☐ = difficult

Hecticity Level: 1=dead 2=slow 3=steady 4=busy 5=hectic

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